

Why responsible handling, reporting of hazardous waste is crucial

"Hazardous waste" is waste that contains organic or inorganic elements or compounds that may, owing to the inherent physical, chemical or toxicological characteristics of that waste, have a detrimental impact on human health and the [environment](#). All businesses generate some form of waste stream, but many don't realise that their waste may be considered hazardous and is potentially harmful or even fatal, if not disposed of correctly.



Image source: Gallo/Getty

Brindha Roberts, head of sustainability at Averda, explains how a business can determine whether their waste is hazardous or not and what their next steps should be to ensure they comply with regulations.

Roberts believes that it is crucial for waste to be correctly classified. This needs to be done as per the [Waste Classification and Management Regulations](#). This classification, in accordance with SANS 10234, must be conducted within 180 days of generation and ultimately establishes whether a waste is hazardous based on the nature and the severity of hazard posed.

Far-reaching implications

"Any breach of this protocol could have far-reaching implications. If not properly managed, some forms of hazardous waste can quickly spread and contaminate land, water and air," Roberts explains.

The South African Department of Environment, Forestry and Fisheries (DEFF) has set guidelines for both the management of such waste and for the collection of accurate data around how much of the various types of it are being generated.

Within SAWIS (South African Waste Information System) we have for over a decade recorded routine data on the tonnages of waste generated, recycled and disposed of in South Africa.

“This information allows authorities to keep track of the volumes of hazardous waste that are in circulation and plan accordingly, both at a governmental level and the level of individual businesses and assists to establish duty of care,” added Roberts.

Objective of SAWIS

The objective of the national waste information system is to store, verify, analyse, evaluate and provide data and information for the protection of the environment and management of waste within South Africa.

The analysis provided by SAWIS gives vital information on the proportion of hazardous wastage that is recovered via recycling and that which is treated and disposed of. This information is made readily available to the public as well as to government departments and can be requested online in the form of auto-generated reports from the database.

By law, any company that generates 20kg or more of hazardous waste per day needs to apply for a SAWIS registration number. Gauteng and Western Cape have localised systems - Gauteng Waste Information System (GWIS) and the Integrated Pollutant and Waste Information System (IPWIS) that feed into the SAWIS. Businesses based in either of these provinces would need to apply using their local system.

“Nevertheless, we’ve noticed many smaller firms are still unaware of this legislation, and how it affects their duties and obligations when it comes to hazardous waste,” notes Roberts.

“In fact, around half of the hazardous waste that arrives at Averda’s flagship Vlakfontein landfill site have no SAWIS registration number, which compromises Averda’s own licence requirements, and causes administrative hiccups.

“The waste then needs to be retroactively reloaded onto the system so as not to compromise the accuracy of our reporting or our compliance,” Roberts explains. Hazardous waste is assessed, and verified, before being accepted for treatment or disposal.

Different approaches required

Roberts clarifies that waste is handled according to local regulations, and the specific needs of the client. The various types of hazardous waste require differing approaches.

According to Roberts, the SAWIS application process is simple and can be done online or in hard copy. “Complying with the DEA SAWIS guidelines is important, not only for the sake of waste management procedures but ultimately because responsible waste management will protect people and the environment,” Roberts concludes.

All information necessary to be included on to the SAWIS database and to obtain a DEA registration number is available [here](#).